TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH GERALD FRANCIS RIDSDALE AT THE PASTORAL CENTRE, ST. FRANCIS' CHURCH, LONSDALE STREET MELBOURNE ON 6TH JUNE 1994 BETWEEN 10 AM AND 2 PM

"Gerry, can I ask you where you were born and educated?"

"I was born in St. Arnaud and lived there until I was about three or four, then we went to Bendigo and started school there. We were about three years and then moved to Ballarat East for six months or so and then to Redan. We have lived in that house for over fifty years or so. Primary school was across the road at St. Aloysius until I was old enough to go to Drummond Street to the Christian Brothers and then from there up to St. Patrick's College from 1946 to 1949 as a day student. Brother Healy was the Principal there then and then I left school at fourteen. I went to work for an accountancy firm, J.N. Cooke and Co., and worked there as an office boy or clerk for three years and it was during the third year that I thought I might like to be a Priest, so I had a talk with a Priest friend, Dan Boylen and he steered me in the right direction. I went to see the Bishop, Bishop O'Collins and had to go back to St. Patrick's College in 1953 to do Leaving. I went back and did Leaving and went into the Seminary in Werribee and was there for five years and was transferred to Genoa and was there two years and was transferred to All Hallows in Dublin and did my last year there and came home for Ordination in 1961."

"At St. Patrick's Ballarat at school was there anything of a sexual nature you remember?"

"Yes, I can remember on three different occasions, the first was by an older cousin who stayed at our place one night and I probably would have been about eight or nine. "

"What form of molestation was it?"

"We were a big family and so there was a limited number of beds in the place and this

cousin came and was staying the night and he was put into bed with me, to sleep with me and I can remember molesting me, playing with my penis, but I cannot remember anything much about the experience except the smell. He had been drinking and was dirty. He was probably nineteen or so and that was the first clear memory I have. I have another memory of an uncle who was, as I see it now, was making advances towards me and putting his hand on my knee and up my leg up to my crutch, but there was never anything came of that, but I guess now it was a kind of a sexual testing sort of a thing. I have some vague memory of being in a hall, whether a school or parish hall and a Christian Brother and I am pretty sure it was a Christian Brother who just fondled me around the genitals, but outside my trousers. I cannot remember if he was from St. Patrick's; I was probably around eleven or twelve, about that age, but that is a hazy kind of memory that I have."

"Before you went to the Seminary did you have any sexual experience like molestation, heterosexual or other sexual experience?"

"No, masturbation was the big problem?"

"When did that start?"

"I can't remember, but I think eleven or twelve, whenever it starts for most people."

"I have incidents here which I have in precis. I want to ask you about them, but they are only the ones you have been charged over from the Brief and current ones. When did you first recall any molestation by you of a younger person?"

"When I was in the Seminary at Werribee probably and that was going out and helping on camps for under privileged children. A vague kind of a memory there of students going

to help Priests with looking after children. I even forget where we went to."

"There could have been episodes there?"

"Yes, but again there is only a vague recollection of sleeping close to a lad and cuddling, but I have no clear recollection of any masturbation, nothing clear, it seemed to be just a need for intimacy, hugging and closeness".

"Did you have any heterosexual experiences with women at all?"

"No, No."

"That was in the Seminary at Werribee in 1954 to 1958 and then you were in Genoa. Would there have been many incidents do you think before you went away and whilst you were in the Seminary? There is an allegation by REDACTED which is rather garbled see what you think of it?"

"I have the Statement, it is in my mind."

"He says something about a send-off to you before you went to Genoa?"

"I do have some kind of a memory of being sexually involved with REDACTED, but all of that kind of stuff that he has there just doesn't make sense. I think he is probably confused with the send off and some other occasions."

"He is talking about Sydney Road Coburg; where was the send off for you that he is talking about?"

"I cannot remember having a send off down there at all. There was one at home, and what I think might have happened would be that that is where an uncle of mine had the hotel. The McLain's, the McLain's and the Drums across the road from Pentridge. It is still in the Drum family; well my uncle married a Drum and so he and his brother in law had that hotel, I think it is the Coburg Hotel. I have some kind of a recollection of having gone there with REDACTED and staying the night. It may have been an occasion

when I was saying goodbye to those relatives or whatever. But from what I remember there was no send off or anything down there. I can't even remember whether I drove or was driven from Ballarat down to catch the ship or perhaps we might have gone via the Hotel and had lunch there and then gone off."

"He seems to think he saw a large boat leaving the wharf and streamers being thrown which was the custom in those days?"

"They lived just up around the corner from us in Ballarat and their family and our family was very close, so their family would have been some of the people who came down to see me off."

"REDACTED says he was born in 1946 and in 1958 you went to Genoa; he would have been twelve and do you recall having some sexual experience with him?"

"Yes, I have a feeling and that is all, that I had some kind of sexual experience with REDACTED, but I can't remember any details. I can remember the two of us being down there at my uncle's Hotel, but I can't remember what rooms we were in; I think he was in a separate room."

"Can you remember being in bed with him?"

"No I can't and I can't remember touching him or him touching me or anything like that, but I have a gut feeling that I have offended with REDACTED. That was thrown out because there was no charge."

"But probably you will find you will get a Writ for damages claim and in a case like that we want to know if you have some recollection of it, well we will probably accept that that was so. Did you ever see REDACTED again?"

"Yes, when I came back from overseas he was probably still around the area then and the last time I remember seeing him was that he joined the Navy and was on the Voyager

when it was hit and I know that when he was going off on the Voyager I lent him my camera, so we must have still had friendly kind of contact in some way at that stage. I do know how old he would have been, seventeen or eighteen I suppose. I remember him coming back then after it was over and we were bemoaning the fact that my camera had gone down."

"Did you have any genital relationship with him after this Hotel or wherever it was?"

"No I have no memory of any kind of relationship."

"The fact that you lent him a camera indicates that you were reasonably friendly with him?"

"Friendly with him and friendly with the family."

"Did he have you in the gun after this business wherever it was?"

"No, never mentioned it, no."

"That occasion with REDACTED that is before you go overseas, so how many others could there have been before REDACTED?"

"Only that one I can remember, the camp."

"What about in the Seminary, was there any sexual liaison in the Seminary?"

"No, no."

"Was there any discussion or any instructions given to the seminarians on matters sexual in those days of sexual behaviour?"

"Not in Werribee I can't remember anything; my biggest problem there was masturbation and I remember going to my Confessor and confessing it and he said something like "You will have to stop that or otherwise you have got to leave the Seminary". That was the kind of attitude there was towards masturbation etc."

"Nowadays they talk about sexual conduct in a much more open way/"

"Yes I was hoping there would be specific sexual instructions."

"The fact that your masturbation was a problem with you. Did that present a problem going into the Priesthood; did you see that as a problem or did you think it was fairly common conduct amongst others?"

"No, I didn't know a great deal about it, except that I just felt guilty; I knew it was wrong; I was told it was wrong. We lived across the road from the Church and I checked with the Priest and I would often go to him for Confession before Mass and it was just this feeling of guilt about it and as far as joining the Priesthood, I was hoping it would go way."

"With the masturbation, did you have any desire for women?"

"No, No."

"Were you feeling then that you were attracted to young boys?"

"Yes, because of that incident at the camp where I was attracted to cuddle, but I didn't understand what it was all about, but I knew I had this attraction rather to boys than women and when I was working, I remember going out with cousins of mine, we used to go to a dance or to a youth club kind of thing and I did a lot of ballroom dancing and you danced with a girl because you didn't dance with boys. I think I had a crush on one girl I think, I thought I did for a while. But I do remember one night a few of us on the way home were waiting for the tram at the tram stop and my couple of cousins and their boyfriends and they were having kissing competitions to see who kissed the longest and one of the boyfriends of a girl cousin and I felt an attraction to him and I remember it must have been boys kissing boys and boys kissing girls and girls kissing girls and I remember I got more of a kick out of kissing him than I did kissing the female cousins. That was the first kind of indication. I would have been fourteen or fifteen, so looking

back that is the first signal that I was homosexually inclined. I didn't really know what it was all about at that stage. In the Seminary there were one or two fellows that I was particularly attracted to, but you would never try any kind of sexual advances."

"You don't recall any sexual activity amongst the seminarians or the staff there?"

"No, I never heard of any and would never have thought of it, never detected it."

"Do you know where REDACTED is now?"

"No, I haven't a clue where he is now. His parents are dead and his family has moved away."

"When you were in Italy you were in a seminary there from 1958 to 1960, who was with you, was it a big place?"

"No a fairly small place; an international seminary."

"Did you have any association with young males in Italy?"

"No, not in Italy, but I did in England. I went from Italy across to England and got a job as a Housemaster in an Approved School; Whitstible I think; it was in Kent and I do remember there was one lad there; he was a bedwetter and one night I discovered that he had wet the bed, so I took him into where my room was and got him fresh pyjamas and then I said "We will get into bed here as your bed is wet" and I am pretty sure that I fondled his penis. I don't know if I masturbated him, he would have been perhaps ten. As far as clear details, I do know and can remember washing him and putting fresh pyjamas on him and then getting him into bed with me."

"Who was running that Approved School?"

"I think it was a Government school."

"Was this part-time employment for you?"

"I wrote to the YCW looking for a job over the holidays and I think they found a job for me."

"Was that the only one in England do you think?"

"Yes, Whitstible, it may have been a neighbouring town to Kent, but that is one that comes to mind anyway."

"How long do you think you were there?"

"About a month, it was during the Summer vacation and I needed a job for money."

"Then you went to Ireland to All Hallows?"

"That was in Dublin, a seminary. Bishop O'Collins shifted the two of us and we were sent across from Genoa because it was a badly run Seminary and we were getting a bad deal and so he booked us into All Hallows."

"At Genoa, was the learning conducted in English or Italian?"

"Italian with Latin text."

"Were you fluent in Italian?"

"We became fairly fluent in Italian and Latin."

"At All Hallows you were there from 1960 to 1961 just completing your studies?"

"That was my last year; half 1960, half 1961."

"Was there anything there?"

"They were all seminarians and nothing in Ireland."

"Were you ordained?"

"I came back to Ballarat and Bishop O'Collins ordained me."

"Was that masturbation problem still with you?"

"Yes."

"North Ballarat 1962 to 1964 and you were ordained in July 1961; where did you go straight after ordination?"

"The Bishop put me in five different parishes, filling in while fellows were sick or on holidays. The first one was Horsham and the others were Inglewood, Camperdown, Ballarat North and I forget where the other one was."

"So you filled in there until you got an appointment to North Ballarat. In those five places did you have any sexual association with boys?"

"Yes."

"Where at?"

"Inglewood, Camperdown, that is two I can remember."

"Horsham?"

"Horsham, no."

"Do you remember any names of those boys?"

"No."

"Were they altar boys?"

"The one in Camperdown wasn't; he is in this list; he wasn't, I got to know his family. The Inglewood one was an altar boy, yes."

"But this Inglewood one was long before you were appointed to Inglewood?"

"Yes, that is when I was there filling in."

"Well at Inglewood and Camperdown there were incidents way back there in 1961 and 1962 and anywhere else Horsham?"

"Can't remember anything else."

"You don't remember their names?"

"No."

"When I ask do you remember their names, are you levelling with me on that or you think you protecting them?"

"I am not sure of my legal position."

"Well if someone comes and makes a claim say from Inglewood of the 1961 era, perhaps Jack Smith from Inglewood, who is now 46 or 47 and he makes a claim and we say it could be because Gerry says that something did happen there. With your legal position, this is not for anyone else, but CCI and this is not going to be given around to anyone at all and we are not going to seek out people."

"I understand that, but from my Solicitor's advice, this is why we had to wait until after the Hearing, that I can only talk about those people where there have been charges. With you situation and if say John Smith comes, all you have to do is contact me and I would say yes or no. There is plenty of time between a Writ being served and I am acting under legal instruction."

"Well even if you tell us of the incidents and where incidents have happened. So before we leave it you say there was Camperdown and Inglewood, was that numerous?"

"One at each that I can remember."

"There could have been more?"

"I don't think so. I was only a very short time at each place; a month or so."

"North Ballarat, you went there in 1962 were you a Curate?"

"An Assistant. This time I have no idea, I have a vague recollection of the area where the kid lid, but I am pretty sure there was one kid there that I had interfered with, but so far as name, no."

"Do you remember how you interfered with him?"

"No".

"You see some of these are making claims of anal intercourse. Do you admit to any of those?"

"No, I have held the position and I still hold the position that I have never ever penetrated a child."

"Some of them are alleging that aren't they?"

"Yes and I have the difficult job of this week of deciding how I am going to plead to all of the charges."

"Will you do a deal on withdrawing the buggery things?"

"The Solicitor had advised that probably they won't withdraw that. That is what is going on at present, the deputation or whatever the follow up thing is, the prosecutor is deciding on the presentment of charges and my Solicitor's idea is that if I go through them and say "yes I have admitted to some of them" and plead guilty to those, some of them I kept saying "I can't remember, because I couldn't remember details". I have to decide how I am going to plead on those, then I still hold and will hold out, as far as I am concerned now, that I am not guilty of any of the buggery charges. But being willing to plead guilty to quite a lot of these indecent assault and the gross indecent assaults, they may hopefully take them out."

"Well at North Ballarat, you were there for two years, 1963 and 1964, what do you

remember?"

"I have no recollection. What happened with a lot of these interviews with the Police, it is only when a name is mentioned that triggers off the memory, but then there could have been others, but there is only that one and it is only a vague kind of memory."

"Mildura 1964 to 1966, you were there wo or three years?"

"In Mildura, one thing has come up from Mildura and Swan Hill."

"Yes, but when I was doing something at Edenhope, there was mention from someone up at Mildura that the Parish Priest at Mildura could have been counselling someone in relation to something. Did nothing come of it?"

"Never heard anything."

"I didn't follow it through, because I never had enough to follow up on. But it is a case of where there is smoke there is fire and with all the advertising for people to come forth so they can sue whoever they may".

"But there is nothing come forward from Mildura and there is only the one from Swan Hill, whereas there I could have from Mildura probably four."

"Gerry you may find some surfacing in Mildura, but that is only speculative. Swan Hill is there two?"

"So far only one, REDACTED. But in Swan Hill there could probably be another two."

"Mildura, how many do you think there could be?"

"Probably could be four."

"Would they have been altar boys or kids from school?"

"Mainly altar boys."

"They would be the ones you were in continual contact with wouldn't they?"

"Yes."

"Again, it would be masturbation or something like that, but no buggery?"

"No, never."

"Did you ever meet up with any of these boys again after Mildura say, in later years?"

"Yes, there is one I have been in touch with him and his family right through".

"Was that for any reason other than just you liked them?"

"No, they continued the friendship."

"What about the boy?"

"The one that I am thinking of, he through his mother; everytime I went up Broken Hill way to go out in the outback, I would call and see his mother. My mother and his mother were friendly. Wherever I have been, generally Mum and Dad would come and stay and meet some of the people. So this lady and my Mum have been friendly. I know my sister and her husband when they were going up to Mildura for a holiday, this lady put them up. So I have kind of kept in touch with her and she said at one stage "So and so was over in Albury and sometime if you are calling through he would like to see you." So it has been he who made the contact."

"Has he been aggressive in his contacts?"

"No, no, quite friendly, I have been for tea, met his wife and then when all this stuff blew up in the paper it was he and his wife who wrote to me offering their support and I have been up to see them since. There is one from Swan Hill and he is here in Melbourne and living in a gay relationship for the last seven years and he has kept in touch and he is supporting me fully."

"Did he indicate if his gay relationship has anything to do with his sexual association with

you?"

"No, as far as he is concerned it had no effect at all."

"He probably believes that he was born that way. I have no opinion either way."

"I don't think it has been proved either way."

"Who was the Parish Priest up Mildura in those days?"

"John Day".

"Swan Hill came after Mildura 1966 to 1969 and there is where REDACTED comes from and you know what he says that you masturbated him, gave talks to him about boys growing up and having erections in the morning and on the basis of being an educational talk and whenever you touched his penis, he had an erection. Was REDACTED from Swan Hill or was he from further out?"

"Swan Hill"

"You used to go and visit Nyah West?"

"Yes, that was part of my job to go out there."

"I know you said before, there is more than REDACTED at Swan Hill?"

"Yes, there would probably be another couple there."

"Do you know what REDACTED does now days?"

"No, haven't a clue."

"What about others?"

"From Swan Hill, no only the one I kept in touch with, the others I wouldn't have a clue."

"He is married and normal?"

"Yes."

"That is the sort of thing we want to find out about them, because if they get in touch with the Solicitors and make claims, everything counts."

"Yes, I know."

"Well REDACTED, you don't know where he is now?"

"No."

"Do you recall him?"

"Yes, I can remember him and his family."

"Can you remember the occasions with him?"

"No, I can't remember any single occasion, but I do know, but I don't know if this makes sense, but I always have this general what I call a gut feeling, that I know I have offended with that lad, but if I were pressed to name a place an occasion, describe the event, I couldn't do it."

"Well I think he says you would go to the Churches at night and you would say to Sirolli's parents you were taking him for a drive to do an inspection at Nyah West or so."

"Nyah West that is where I planted a lot of trees, so I would be going out to water the trees and see how they were going or whatever."

"Warrnambool and this is REDACTED. He says he went to Mildura with you and you were at Warrnambool from 1970 to 1972 by this and he says that he went to Mildura with you, but he thinks you might have had a wedding and there were two other boys went and when you came back to Warrnambool you dropped the other boys and took REDACTED down to the Breakwater and interfered with him down there by oral sex and he says he ejaculated for the first time and he was frightened and he didn't know what was happening and he was sworn to secrecy by you and he hadn't ever told anyone?"

"I can't remember that occasion, but I can remember other occasions with REDACTED."

"Fishing, he mentions fishing along the riverbank?"

"I can remember other occasions with him."

"He went to Whitecliffs in 1971 or 1972 with you he says and you called at your parents home first at Ballarat and stopped the night with your parents and he slept beside you at Whitecliffs camping in tents and you had oral sex and fondled him?"

"Substantially what he claims there is a fair chance that would have been the pattern, except when he comes to the buggery charges."

"You deny the buggery, so we don't pursue them?"

"That's right".

"He says Ridsdale was transferred to Apollo Bay, but about six months later you were down there and got in touch with his parents and REDACTED came down and stayed a week with you and this is when he says you performed oral sex with him and he was anally raped on three occasions at Apollo Bay and you used vaseline as a lubricant for these anal invasions and these are denied by you?"

"They are denied by ~~you~~ me. I can't remember him being down there."

"He says your brother was down there at sometime, Robin or Robert?"

"I have no brother Robin or Robert, but I think it might have been REDACTED and his wife and family were down there. With regard to the vaseline thing, one thing I used to do sometimes was use vaseline to rub my penis up between the cheeks, but no penetration."

"To save chafing, as a lubricant, but no penetration?"

"Yes, as I have said and I have repeated it so often now, I believe an adult to penetrate a child would cause physical damage. I would presume it would cause damage, tearing or bleeding."

"REDACTED he was at Warrnambool; any others at Warrnambool you think?"

"Yes, there is another one in this present lot. REDACTED ."

"Well what happened with REDACTED ?"

"REDACTED was another altar boy that I would have taken fishing and would have interfered with him by masturbation. In Warrnambool I really can't think of any others in Warrnambool, no one else from Warrnambool came to mind.

"In your time was it necessary for you to have these associations or could you rely on masturbation to get some relief. You were at Warrnambool for say two or three years, would these only be isolated incidents in your careers, this wouldn't be going on all the time?"

"Well sometimes it would go on for a while, maybe with one lad over a period of some months just on and off and then you had a time when I was free of the problem. Warrnambool was probably the first place that I tried to get some help or realised that I needed help and I was out at the mental institution near Brierly and part of my job was to go out to Brierly and take communion out and probably had Mass out there and I remember one day there was a psychiatrist or psychologist that I had met a couple of times and I remember saying to him once "Could I just ask you a question, I want to talk about a problem?" and I said something to the effect that "I think I might be homosexual" and I can clearly remember his question "Do you dream about having sex with men?" and I said "No" and he said "Well you have got no problems you are Okay" and rather than follow it up then, with "Well what about kids", I just let it go. But the first time I can remember having the guts to say anything."

"You were at Warrnambool two years. Did you have any complaints up to that time against you from parents or anything from Warrnambool, Swan Hill, Mildura, North Ballarat?"

"The first complaint that ever came in was in my first year as a Priest and that would have been Ballarat North, because part of my responsibility was Villa Maria a little school run by the Mercy, it was a little boarding school for boys out near Xavier Golf Course, Mt. Bogey and it was in Ballarat East area, but in those days Ballarat was just the one Parish and I drove a lad home to down near Winchelsea and while I was there I remember going into his room and fondling him while he was showing me something in the cupboard, toys or whatever and putting my hand down his trousers and touching his penis. It would have a fairly brief kind of thing, then later on the Bishop called me in, Bishop O'Collins, and said there had been a complaint and he said "If this thing happens again then you are off to the Missions" and he sent me to Mildura."

"Is that why you went to Mildura from North Ballarat?"

"Yes, transferred to Mildura?"

"Did he send you to any Doctor or anything?"

"No."

"Did he ever send you to that bloke who is dead, Ed Seal?"

"No. All that was done was just the warning."

"No counselling or anything?"

"No and that was the first complaint that ever came in."

"So you went Mildura and when you left Mildura to go to Swan Hill was that just in the ordinary course of events or were there any complaints about you?"

"No, three years was about the time for an Assistant and then you were normally moved

on."

"Swan Hill to Warrnambool the same?"

"Swan Hill to Warrnambool I overworked in Swan Hill and I think the three years was about up anyway, but I think I said to the Parish Priest "I just have to get here". I think I had what I would call a bit of breakdown and went home for a month."

"Any complaints about you there?"

"No. Then at Warrnambool I just couldn't get on with Monsignor Fiscalini, it was two very hard years there. So the Bishop was away and I went to the Vicar General at the time and he said "Well I will give you a change", so he took me up to where he was in Ballarat East. Monsignor Fiscalini was very hard to work with."

REDACTED

REDACTED

REDACTED You went from Ballarat East in 1974 to Apollo Bay. Were you Parish Priest there, was that your first parish?"

"Yes, my first Parish."

"That indicates that you were held in fairly good esteem?"

"No, it was just my turn, seniority."

"Well there couldn't have been many black marks against you?"

"There was no complaints that I ever knew you, just the Ballarat North one."

REDACTED